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## Biz of Acq -- Issues in Scholarly Communication: Creating Your Own Blog

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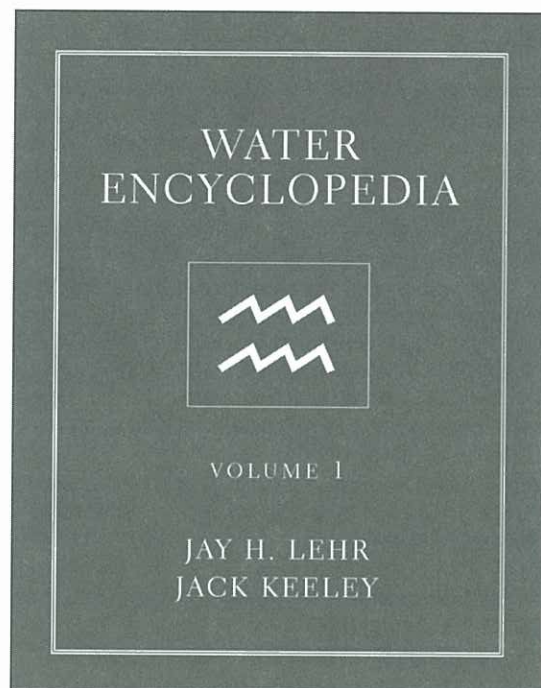
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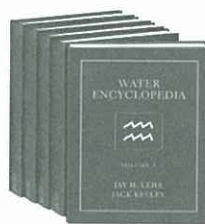
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## Biz of Acq — Issues in Scholarly Communication: Creating Your Own Blog

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**Column Editor: Audrey Fenner** (Librarian (Acquisition Specialist), Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress, 101 Independence Avenue, SE, Washington, DC 20540-7480) <fenner3@att.net>

**Column Editor's Note:** *Weblogs can be considered part of the scholarly communication system in academic institutions. A locally-created blog can be targeted to a specific readership, and can provide current and relevant information to a library's community. Walsh and Daniels describe the use of Weblogs at Georgia State University Library, and suggest sources for finding blogs. — AF*

### Introduction

It has been over a decade since **Ross Atkinson**, in arguing that libraries should be assuming greater responsibility for the effectiveness of the scholarly communication system in an increasingly digital environment, wrote, "The library, and indeed the institution, should be able to look to acquisitions as the authority on advances in electronic publishing for purposes of

scholarly communication."<sup>1</sup> So far, that hasn't happened, at least, not in the way or on the scale he imagined then. **Atkinson's** piece called on acquisitions librarians to lead the academy's charge in taking control of scholarly publishing. And while momentum for change appears to be building, and alternative models certainly exist, thirteen years later that system remains fundamentally unchanged. There has been no single sweeping revolution. Despite the additional demands (license negotiation, link resolver maintenance, access issues, etc.) that electronic resources can carry, most in acquisitions serve their institutions in a role largely similar to that of their forerunners, as the liaison between the library and the business world.

Although we will not renew **Atkinson's** call for acquisitions librarians to lead the revolution to reform the way that academic research is disseminated (the issue is complex and there are

too many other legitimate stakeholders), we do assume that those in acquisitions and related positions, because of their unique perspective as intermediaries between academia and the commercial community, need to be involved on some level in their institution's ongoing conversation regarding issues with the current system of scholarly communication. This may seem patently obvious, but for those working in technical services at some institutions, it can be difficult to reach an audience outside of the library.

One way to foster an environment of communication is consistently to share your message with your institution. A good means to accomplish this is through a blog. The advantages of using a blog to communicate with your audience are numerous. They include the ability to incorporate the blog into your existing

*continued on page 86*



Website, the ability to post entries without knowledge of HTML, the ability to allow multiple people to contribute content and share responsibility for managing the blog, and the ability to provide an **RSS (Really Simple Syndication)** feed to allow readers to be notified of updates to your blog through their RSS reader. Over a year ago, as part of an effort to raise awareness about problems with the current state of scholarly publishing, **Georgia State University Library** created a blog about scholarly communication.<sup>2</sup> This essay will discuss the **Georgia State** experience to date and offer suggestions for librarians interested in using blogs as a tool to keep themselves and their communities informed.

### A Brief History of Blogs at Georgia State University Library

**Georgia State University Library** currently offers more than 20 subject-specific blogs to patrons. All include RSS feeds. In addition to the library's main news blog, others blogs are devoted to: economics, education, government information, history, public health, religious studies, sociology, and science. The "Issues in Scholarly Communication" blog is unique in that most of the library's other blogs are maintained by subject liaisons and are targeted to the students and faculty of the departments they serve, while the scholarly communications blog is currently maintained by librarians in technical services.

Two excellent articles detailing the background of blogs at **Georgia State University Library** have been published by those responsible for starting the library's blogging initiative.<sup>3</sup> If you are interested in further information, please look at these articles. We will not devote additional space to them here except to note that, a) our blogs are hosted on our server and were built by our Web Development Librarian and Web Programmer with **Windows IIS, MySQL, and Active Server Pages**, and, b) rather than developing their own software, librarians interested in starting their own blogs might consider an existing free application like **WordPress** or may wish to look into a hosted Weblog provider.

### Why Bother?

For those of you thinking, "Ugh, not another blog, there are already better sources for information about scholarly communication," you're absolutely right. There are better sources for current news and information about particular issues in scholarly communication, the absolute best being **Peter Suber's Open Access News**.<sup>4</sup> Thankfully, it's not a competition, and it is perfectly fine if a blog fails to attract anything beyond a local readership. In fact, that may be a good thing. Since it's unlikely that the best existing resource on a given topic is targeted specifically to your community, you have the opportunity to create a resource specifically for it. As noted on the Website **Create Change**, "Library directors who have mounted successful advocacy programs on scholarly communication have stressed the importance of

against the grain

## people profile

Tim Daniels

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Phone: 404-651-1430 <timdaniels@gsu.edu>

**BORN & LIVED:** Born in Kentucky lived most of my life in North Carolina.

**EARLY LIFE:** Most of my early life was spent in rural North Carolina near a small town called Seagrove and a small city called Asheboro (which is where the North Carolina Zoo is). I worked in my High School Library and in a book store before college.

**FAMILY:** I have a wife, **Kate**, and a 5 month old daughter, **Julia**. My wife is a Medical Librarian with Children's Health Care of Atlanta.

**EDUCATION:** I have a B.S. in History with a concentration in Public History and minors in Computer Information systems Management and English from **Appalachian State University** in Boone North Carolina, and I have a MLIS from the **University of North Carolina at Greensboro** and am working on a Masters in Instructional Technology at the **University of Georgia**.

**FIRST JOB:** (If you mean my real first job) I painted warehouses and schools with my grandfather between the ages of 12-16.

After my undergraduate work and during my MLIS I worked at **UNC-Asheville's Ramsey Library** in the Special Collections, and in the library at **Asheville Buncombe Technical Community College**.

**PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES:** I was the Branch Manager for a branch library in the **Asheville Buncombe Library System** and from there moved on to be a reference librarian at **Georgia Tech**.

**IN MY SPARE TIME (before the Baby) I LIKED TO:** Cook, read, and hike.

**SPARE TIME AFTER THE BABY** (between feedings, diaper changes, and tummy time) I still try to fit in time to read and cook some. I have also begun to collect Fountain Pens.

**FAVORITE BOOKS:** Well...All of **David Eddings'** early works, *The Diamond Age*, or *A Young Ladies Illustrated Primer* by **Neal Stephenson**. **John Dunning's Bookman Mysteries**.

**PET PEEVES/WHAT MAKES ME MAD:** Individuals who obstruct the process (of anything) because they can't or won't see the big picture.

**PHILOSOPHY:** "Tell me, and I will forget. Show me, and I may remember. Involve me, and I will understand." — Confucius circa 450 BC

Followed by "If you can't contribute get out of the way." — A group of **Georgia Tech** physical plant managers during a project planning workshop. Circa 2003.

**MOST MEANINGFUL CAREER ACHIEVEMENT:** Moving things forward where ever I have been and realizing when it was time to get out of the way.

**GOAL I HOPE TO ACHIEVE FIVE YEARS FROM NOW:** Five years from now I would like to have a PhD in Instructional Technology and be involved in library management.

**HOW/WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS:** In five years I see the library as a blended landscape where the physical environment invites (users, patrons, customers...) to meet, sit, work and reflect and where our virtual resources are object oriented enough to be placed at "point of need" for just in time use by our (users, patrons, customers...). It may take longer than five years to achieve this but I think this is the direction libraries (all libraries academic, public, special, school) should move towards.

understanding the local culture and subcultures in mounting advocacy programs."<sup>5</sup> Your faculty may or may not be interested in particular topics, or they may not have the time or inclination to read 15 to 20 posts a day on another site. Much like current literature alerts and selective collection development, targeted blog postings can be used to provide an institution's users with the most current and relevant information.

### Our Blog

The "Issues in Scholarly Communications" blog was launched in December 2003. From the start, the intent has been to provide links to news items of relevance rather than offer much, if any, commentary. Although early posts were dominated by items discussing Open Access, we have tried over the last several months to broaden the scope so that other issues of inter-

continued on page 87





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## Biz of Acq from page 86

est are addressed more frequently. In addition, we try not to overload people with information by posting too often. Since the blog began, more than 320 entries have been posted by five contributors (the Acquisitions Librarian, the AUL for Technology Services, the Collection Development Officer, the Digital Technologies Librarian, and the Electronic Resources Librarian). Recent topics include:

- Conference and forum announcements
- Issues in research ethics and fraud
- The cost of textbooks and coursepacks (including issues with electronic textbooks)
- E-journal self-archiving policies
- Academics winning 2005 Pulitzer Prizes
- The Creative Commons project
- The NIH Public Access Policy
- Institutional repository launches
- The U.S. Copyright Office inquiry on Orphan Works
- The Google Print Library Project
- The commercialization of scholarship and the need for a profit motive in scientific research and publishing
- Changes to restrictions on U.S. publishers working with authors from countries under U.S. sanctions
- Because the comments feature on our blog

is currently disabled, it can sometimes seem as if we're blogging in a vacuum. It's rare that someone will talk to one of us about a given post. However, it's important to keep in mind that once you start a blog, readers will expect you to update often. Otherwise your readers, however few or many, will stop paying attention.

## Staying Current with Blogs

Two of the biggest problems related to reading blogs are 1) finding them and 2) keeping up with them. The world of blogs is a rich and complex one. Finding a blog to read on a topic that interests you is in some ways harder than finding a Website dedicated to a topic you are interested in. Fortunately, there are several good resources for blog discovery, including LISFeeds, Feedster and NewsIsFree. Many bloggers post links on their blog sites to the blogs they read.

RSS and an RSS reader are the best way to keep track of the blogs you find interesting. There are free RSS readers such as Bloglines (our favorite), or you can purchase a reader like FeedDemon. When you visit a blog, just look for a button or a link with RSS or XML and paste the link into your RSS reader.

Following are four freely available and popular sources worth monitoring for news about issues in scholarly communication. All

have RSS Feeds.

**Guardian Unlimited** (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/life/>) You won't find information on issues related to scholarly communication here on a daily basis, but it's definitely worth checking. A recent article featured a good discussion on author self-archiving.

**Lessig blog** (<http://www.lessig.org/blog/>)

Lessig is Professor of Law at Stanford Law School, chair of the Creative Commons Project, and author of *Free Culture: How Big Media Uses Technology and the Law to Lock Down Creativity*. A recent post by Lessig discussed his decision

not to publish in academic journals that limit how his work can be distributed.

**Slashdot** (<http://slashdot.org/>) Slashdot (sometimes written as /.) has been around since 1997 (eons in this medium); their tagline is "News for nerds, stuff that matters." A recent post discussed the IEEE article, "Information Free-for-All?" Postings typically generate a great deal of feedback. As of this writing, the IEEE post has generated nearly 400 comments.

*continued on page 88*





**Slate** (<http://www.slate.com/>) This daily news magazine, which was formerly owned by **Microsoft**, was recently purchased by **The Washington Post Company**. A recent article discussed the fact that only the first four volumes of a new translation of **Proust's** *In Search of Lost Times* have appeared in the United States due to the passage of the **Sonny Bono Copyright Act**.

### Blogging for Yourself

The best thing about trying to blog regularly on a particular subject is that it offers the opportunity to learn about that subject. **Cory Doctorow**, science fiction writer and European Affairs Coordinator for the **Electronic Frontier Foundation**, says of editing his popular blog:

... [O]perating "Boing Boing" has not only given me a central repository of all of the fruits of my labors in the information fields, but it also has increased the volume and quality of the yield. I know more, find more, and understand better than I ever have.<sup>6</sup>

Through blogging about issues in scholarly communication, we have learned not only a good deal about scholarly publishing but also about copyright, institutional repositories, and digital information. The exercise has allowed us to gain a deeper understanding of many of the factors at play in the world of scholarly communications. Moreover, since our blog is a searchable database, the information we have posted is always available to us, ready to be retrieved when the need arises.

### Access Statistics

Although word-of-mouth reaction to the blog has been overwhelmingly positive, we would like to have an idea of the number of people the blog reaches. Unfortunately, even though we read monthly statistical reports, this can be difficult. For the first few months, the number of requests made to our server nearly doubled monthly. Since March 2004, the number of requests has been consistent, averaging around 800 per month. So what does this tell us? As **Jeffrey Goldberg** explains in his somewhat overwrought "Why Web Usage Statistics are (Worse Than) Meaningless," no inference about the number or identity of people reading

## against the grain people profile

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**FAMILY:** Wife, **Felicity**. 3 year old son, **Liam**.

**EDUCATION:** BA and MA in English from the **University of New Hampshire**.  
MLS from **Simmons College**.

**FIRST JOB:** Grounds keeping at a polo club in Massachusetts. First professional position was working as a bibliographer for **YBP Library Services**.

**FAVORITE BOOKS:** *My Truck is Stuck!*, *Bear Snores On*.

the site can be gleaned from these numbers.<sup>7</sup> What we can tell is that most of the requests being made are consistently coming from the **Georgia State University** domain.

### Conclusion

In today's environment, it is not enough for acquisitions librarians to manage the day-to-day business of acquisitions. The ever-increasing costs of library resources combined with current budgets have brought the process by which

libraries acquire materials to the fore. This new attention has created an atmosphere of change, and acquisitions librarians with their unique perspective can be a part of that change. Communication is the first step in any successful change process. Users must be educated and staff must be made aware. Here at the **Georgia State University Library** the initial communication phase has taken the form of the "Issues in Scholarly Communications" blog. 

### Endnotes

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## Books Are Us

by **Anne K. Robichaux** (Professor Emerita, Medical University of South Carolina) <[awkr7721@sc-online.net](mailto:awkr7721@sc-online.net)>

### Column Editor's

**Note:** This column covers fictitious accounts of people in our industry — librarians, publishers, vendors, booksellers, etc. — people like us. All contributions, comments, suggestions are welcomed. — AR

The back cover of *The Librarian* (Nation Books, Avalon Publishing, 2004, ISBN 1-56025-636-2) by award winning author **Larry Beinhart** poses the question: "How did nebbish university librarian **David Goldberg** end up hunted by **Homeland Security** and on Virginia's ten most wanted list for bestiality?" That didn't entice me to check the book out of

our local library as much as the title and the thought this would be great for this column. But the book is entertaining, a thriller, and the descriptions of four librarian characters, including our action hero (not just "the keeper of the flame") did not disappoint.

One character, **Elaina Whisthoven**, is de-

*continued on page 89*